



**RGC Presentation to the
Standing Committee of Justice and Human Rights
February 25th at 12-1pm re: Bill C-218: An Act to amend the Criminal Code**

INTRO

- Good afternoon Madame Chair and members of the Standing Committee of Justice and Human Rights. Thank you for inviting the Responsible Gambling Council to share our perspective on Bill C 218. I would like to introduce to you my colleague Tracy Parker, Director of Standards and Accreditation who is joining me.
- RGC is a respected Canadian non-profit, charitable organization whose mission is to prevent problem gambling and reduce its impact. Canada is regarded as a leader in responsible gambling and we are proud to be a part of this.
- Our position on gambling is neutral. Gambling is a legal activity in Canada and as such, we exist to ensure safeguards are in place to minimize the risks associated with gambling. For over 35 years, RGC has worked closely with regulators and operators, to provide strategic guidance, research, accreditation, and we work with the public to deliver education and information so they can make informed decisions about gambling. We are gratified by the work that we do and how it influences a safer gambling industry. For instance, it was RGC who prepared the Responsible Gambling Programming Cross Canada Review for Paul Burns, at the Canadian Gaming Association that Mr. Waugh referenced on Tuesday, in his meeting with you.

SPORTS BETTING OVERVIEW

- Over the last few years, sports betting has grown in popularity and with it, the body of evidence to suggest who is gambling, the issues associated with sports betting and how to support a safer sports betting industry.
- According to the 2018 Canadian Community Health Survey (CCHS) sports betting prevalence is 7.9 % in Canada, with Alberta and Manitoba showing the highest proportion of participation.
- According to a survey that RGC conducted in August 2020 with Ontarians, we asked about participation in live online sports betting with a bookmaker.
 - **62%** of males responded that they had participated;

- 34 % had recently lost employment or had reduced hours of employment;
 - 13% were screened with severe anxiety;
 - 47% positively screened for problem gambling;
 - Over 1 in 10 intend to gamble online post COVID-19; and
 - 5% intend to increase their online gambling when more options are available in Ontario.
- And while this study was about gambling during COVID-19, we know that the impacts from the pandemic will be long-lasting and this study clearly underscores the importance of prevention safeguards as a priority, as governments seek to provide broader exposure to gambling.
 - While gambling has existed in Canada for many years, it's important to take note of how sports betting differs from other forms of gambling. Sports betting ties gambling to a favourite pastime enjoyed by millions. This association normalizes the gambling activity. Added to this, sports betting has the added complexity of emotion tied into the gambling experience. The emotion associated with the heat of the moment game play can make informed decision making about spend and time spent playing more difficult.
 - Left unregulated as it is currently, vulnerable people are at risk.

OUR POSITION

- It is with these people in mind that we speak to you today.
- RGC believes that it is in the best interest of Canadians and Canadian society as a whole that Bill C-218 should be passed. This would allow provincial authorities to establish a regulatory framework for single event sports betting.
- Coupled with this, we believe it is imperative that consumer protection is at the heart of the regulations.
- It is with this this evidence and Canadian's best interests in mind that RGC recommends the following to the Committee:
 - The legalization of single event sports betting includes a robust regulatory framework that requires regulators and operators to prioritize and integrate consumer protection within their strategy. And that all provincial authorities adhere to similar set of responsible gambling standards and are accountable for making it a priority.

- The federal government continues to champion the prevention of addictions and preservation of individual's mental health and well-being, in accordance with Canada's Mental Health Commission Strategy. This can be achieved by prioritizing consumer safety and supporting the provincial authorities to develop comprehensive responsible gambling strategies, as well as build their capacity to support individuals and their communities, when they introduce legalized sports betting.
- The good news is that we don't need to re-create the wheel. Most of the standards already exist and in place for land-based gambling. We also have the benefit of the lessons learned from other jurisdictions.

CLOSING

- In closing Madam Chair and members of the Committee, it is with RGC's neutral and independent stance that we highly recommend that Bill C-218 should be passed. This would ensure that risk mitigation strategies are in place and those who are vulnerable are protected.
- This is a unique opportunity to bring together stakeholders from health, mental health, education, financial, and the policing sectors, with the gambling industry, to create a Made in Canada responsible gambling culture comprised of evidence informed regulations and leading practices. We have an opportunity to learn from jurisdictions who have come before us and apply the highest level of safeguards to this form of gambling.
- And embedded in the culture, is a commitment to ongoing measurement and evaluation to validate the effectiveness and impact of the regulations, standards and programs.
- This thoughtful and intentional approach will demonstrate Canada's commitment to prosperity, as well as the health and well-being of Canadians and society.
- Thank you